THE IDEONYM
THE FUNCTION AND IMPACT OF POLITICAL NEOLOGISMS WITH PRESIDENTIAL ASSOCIATIONS

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

The United States political parties are in the midst of war of words over the name of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Republicans have labeled the law "Obamacare" and are using it as a referendum on the entire healthcare agenda of the Obama administration and their opinion of his "tyrannical overreach." Democrats are fighting to dissociate the word from the negative connotation that has become attached to it by accepting it into their political vernacular as well, trying to make the word that has been accepted by the American public and media a more neutral term. This word "Obamacare" has had a large impact on the healthcare debate both in Congress and among the public, and is an example of a rhetorical device which hitherto has been largely unidentified and unexamined.

This rhetorical device operates by making an individual synonymous with a law, a scandal, or an entire ideology in the eyes of the American public through the creation of a neologism with the purpose of establishing a black-and-white value judgment of that law, scandal, or ideology by association with the individual, and vice versa. For example, Republicans used "Obamacare" as a nickname for the Affordable Care Act, especially early on, to encourage their voters who didn't approve of the President to transfer that disapproval to the law without fully understanding its provisions. The device can be effectively used by creating a portmanteau with the individual's name directly in it, as is the case with "Obamacare" and "Reaganomics", or it can operate by associating an event or idea already synonymous with an individual to another event or idea, as is the case with "Watergate" and its countless variations (i.e. adding the "-gate" suffix onto the end of new scandals to bring the level of scandal up to the status of Watergate, which ultimately lead to the resignation of Richard Nixon).

In today's ever-increasingly partisan political climate, I would argue that this sort of rhetoric is becoming more and more effective, and as a result the use of this rhetorical device is on the

upswing. Contemporary study of political rhetoric is missing an examination of this strategy, and without a precise unpacking of this device we cannot isolate its impact and power of persuasion. Its increasing prominence in political rhetorical strategy earns this rhetorical device examination and a term of its own; I'd like to suggest a neologism of my own to define such devices: "ideonym."

REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP

In defining the ideonym and understanding its unique place in American political rhetoric, it is helpful to review similar phenomena in political language. Concepts like "ultimate terms," "god, devil and charismatic terms," ideographs, terministic screens, frames, brands, and labels all bear upon the concept and function of the ideonym.

Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, published in 1950, first examined the concept of "ultimate terms" in depth. These are "phrase[s] that represent the ideas or values that hold primary motivational potency or preeminent ranking in the public discourse of an era, culture, or community"[1]. Burke explains that an ultimate term serves as the "guiding idea" or "unitary principal" around which other terms are rallied and against which they are measured[2]. He argues that these terms can "organize one's attitude towards the struggles of politics" and serve as evidence of superiority of certain ideals over others.

Burke's examination of ultimate terms is more focused on the hierarchy of persuasive, value-laden terms which aim to establish an evaluative series to demonstrate "a fixed and reasoned progression from one of these to another, [so that] the members of the entire group [are] arranged *developmentally* with relation to one another"[3]. Even so, his research on ultimate terms bears heavily on modern study of potent political terms. Burke's primary contribution is the concept of a collective rhetoric, an unexamined but accepted narrative in which certain terms, or the ideas with which they are associated, are valued over others (i.e. "security" often trumps "privacy" in the debate over governmental access to personal information).

In his 1953 work titled *Ethics of Rhetoric*, Richard Weaver unpacks the use of ultimate terms in contemporary rhetoric, stating "a single term is an incipient proposition, awaiting only the necessary coupling with another term; and it cannot be denied that single names set up expectancies of

propositional embodiment"[4]. Weaver discusses two types of these single term expressions associated with observable things; a good term that serves to validate and bless an idea or person called a "god term" and its antonym, a bad term that serves to rebuke or repulse, called a "devil term." He also discusses "charismatic terms," associated with a more abstract set of values. He approaches the discussion of these terms within a hierarchy of power, with each "god term" and "devil term"" measured against each other in terms of power and effectiveness. These terms are impenetrable; "god terms" are automatic and indestructible; "devil terms" cannot be defended or accepted. These terms are particular to a certain age and culture; what has been a "god term" at one time may not retain its power 50 years later. These are terms whose meanings are vague but whose connotations are clear with an "inherent potency" but often specific to an audience[5].

Weaver provides "progressive" and "science" as examples of "god terms" in *Ethics of Rhetoric*[6]. Politicians often employ these types of terms to validate their message or candidacy, or to justify a sacrifice in another arena. Weaver explains, "this capacity to demand sacrifice is probably the surest indicator of the 'god term,' for when a term is so sacrosanct that the material goods of this life are rendered up to it, then we feel justified in saying that it is in some sense ultimate"[7]. "In the name of progress" is a potent defense, even when the terms and specifics of the progress are unclear or not universally valued.

"Un-American" is an example of a "devil term" examined by Weaver[8] that is often observed in political rhetoric today. No modern discourse agrees, or even tries to overtly establish a clear, cohesive definition of "American"; an attempt to do so would be entering a minefield of alienation and offense. Even so, politicians and ideas are routinely labeled as "Un-American," evidence of their ineptitude and lack of value in American society. As with "god terms," "devil terms" are employed to disarm an opponent without having to discuss specifics, because while a specific agenda or position can be defended, an "un-American" position is simply that: not right for Americans. A

person labeled "un-American" in American politics cannot simply embrace or ignore this charge. They have to spend time and energy fighting against this accusation, which can be quite difficult as there is no concrete evidence or example of "un-American" action that they can disprove.

"Charismatic terms" are different from "god terms" and "devil terms" in that they are not associated with observable things but rather with intangible values. "Freedom" is an example of a charismatic term. Words like "freedom" create a goal to strive for, in theory so that the speaker invoking the demand for more freedom can become the means of accomplishing that goal without offering any specific or clear direction. Politicians can also offer up a "charismatic term" as evidence of their opponents' shortcomings, by creating a problem with the status quo (i.e. a "lack of freedom") without having to define specific problems or offering solutions.

Weaver suggests that upon hearing these terms a listener should "hold a dialectic with himself" to consider the motives of the speaker employing such purposely vague words[9].

Michael Calvin McGee's work on ideographs furthers the concept of the "ultimate term," taking a more direct look at its place in political language. In particular, he examines the political language that uses particular phrases or words to express abstract political ideologies (which often distort or conceal the source and beneficiaries of popular political ideas and programs) in concrete political discourse. He argues that the "political language which manifests ideology seems characterized by slogans, a vocabulary of 'ideographs' easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy"[10]. The ideograph is described as "an ordinary-language term found in political discourse. It is a high order abstraction representing commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal"[11]. Through use of these terms the speaker aims to connect rhetoric to an ideology within a political consciousness, hoping to create a label that encapsulates the ideology and makes it more digestible, if not clearer. Ideographs are used to convey a specific feeling associated with a complex ideological position. The power behind these words is that they are recognized as

having some important, concrete political meaning even though many people can't recognize what exactly that meaning is. This ambiguity allows for acceptance of an idea even when the listener doesn't really know what he or she is subscribing to. Some words seem to just lend themselves to being used as ideographs, like *liberty* or *tyranny,* because we have been conditioned to understand them as such.

As students of McGee's furthered the definition, "Ideographs represent in condensed form the normative, collective commitments of the members of a public, and they typically appear in public argumentation as the necessary motivations or justifications for action performed in the name of the public"[12]. In order for ideographs to function, there must be a widely agreed upon collective rhetoric within a political landscape, and ordinary-language terms must have an additional connotation within a political context that is widely understood. McGee states, "Business and labor, Democrats and Republicans, Yankees and Southerners are *united* by the ideographs that represent the political entity "United States" and *separated* by a disagreement as to the practical meaning of such ideographs"[13]. While McGee is wary of the reach of the Marxist theory that governing elites create, maintain, and manipulate a mass consciousness "suited to perpetuation of the existing order"[14] he believes that ideographs are an example of this "dominant ideology" which wields so much influence in political life.

Kenneth Burke's discussion of terministic screens establishes a more practical method of recognizing and examining the function of his "ultimate terms," Weaver's "god terms," "devil terms," and "charismatic terms," and McGee's "ideographs." Terministic screens serve to direct attention away from one interpretation of an idea, event, or person and towards another interpretation. Different terministic screens can be employed to change the interpretation of one set of facts. Says Burke:

> "When I speak of 'terministic screens,' I have particularly in mind some photographs I once saw. They were *different* photographs of the *same* objects, the difference being that they were made with different color filters. Here something so "factual" as a photograph revealed notable distinctions in texture, and even in form, depending upon which color filter was used for the documentary description of the event being recorded"[15]

He then goes on to define terministic screens as "a screen composed of terms through which humans perceive the world, and that direct attention away from some interpretations and toward others"[16]. He states that people create and employ terministic screens both consciously and unconsciously, and that these screens can both betray an inherent prejudice and encourage others to adopt it. He identifies two types of terministic screens; a scientistic screen concerned with defining and naming, creating a black-and-white binary, and a dramatistic screen concerned with directing the audience toward action[17]. The audience can either associate or dissociate with a term, and thus with the reality described by the term, based on the terministic screen employed[18]. Burke also holds that terministic screens are unavoidable, as "even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality"[19].

A modern example of terministic screens being employed in political rhetoric is observed in the abortion rights debate. Proponents of legal abortion primarily refer to the "fetus" when discussing the procedure. This is a scientistic screen that defines the object of the procedure as a medical consideration, with no human value or moral judgment attached to it. The use of "fetus" removes the human element of the procedure; it is an argument about a medical procedure that is best performed legally by trained medical staff. In contrast, anti-abortion rights groups never use the term "fetus," instead calling it a "baby." Through this terministic screen, an abortion procedure is

anything but a cold, clinical judgment. It invokes the cute, loveable image of a human baby and the inherent desire of people to protect them. Both of these screens ignore crucial elements of the real definition the object of an abortion procedure; "fetus" eliminates the fact that if left alone the "fetus" will grow into a human person and "baby" ignores that fact that at the moment in question the "baby" is not a viable human but rather a growing mass of cells incapable of surviving outside the womb. Thus these terministic screens each reflect a reality (the object of an abortion is both an unviable organism and a potential human life), select a reality (focus on medical terminology vs. human terminology) and deflect a reality (that there are other, more complete definitions that are not as rhetorically compelling.

Message framing is another critical consideration in the examination of the ideonym. Research abounds in communication studies on the means, method, and impact of message framing, and must be taken into account in the examination of rhetorical terms. Entman (1993) summarizes the framing process and function as follows:

> Framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*. To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described...Frames, then, *define problems* -- determine what a causal agent is doing and with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes* -- identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgment* -- evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies* -- offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects.[20]

Framing operates by "biasing the cognitive processing of information by individuals" in an attempt to persuade the individual to evaluate a message in a particular way[21]. Framing can be the result of both conscious effort and accidental biasing, and is most effective when the frame appears natural to

the audience. Frames often serve to create a lens through which a particular issue or event is viewed; for example, a candidate with a controversial stance on the Keystone Pipeline could choose to frame this as a testament to his leadership skills and ability to make tough choices, as opposed to focusing on the politics of the issue. There are many different forms of frame, but the type that bears most heavily upon this research is *valence framing*, or creating a positive or negative association with the focus of the message.

Working from this definition of framing, the role of ultimate terms in message framing can be evaluated by determining their place in the framing process. To borrow from Weaver, our candidate with the controversial stance on the Keystone Pipeline could also benefit from framing his support for the project through the lens of "progress." By invoking this "god term," the candidate encourages his audience to consider not the destruction of natural resources that comes with the pipeline but rather the construction of a new energy source on American soil, thus making the benefit of the project more salient than the cost. Using a "progress" frame fulfills Entman's steps of a framing process: *defining a problem* -- a lack of progress in American energy sources and relinquishing our reliance on foreign oil; *diagnosing causes* -- the lack of access to the natural oil that the Keystone Pipeline could reach; *making a moral judgment* -- the "progress" in the American energy industry outweighs the ecological and safety issues associated with the project's completion; and *suggesting remedies* -- allow for the completion of the pipeline, with "progress" serving as both the justification and the likely effect.

The intersection of "ultimate terms" and message framing is complicated, with the isolation of each rhetorical device proving difficult. Is an "ultimate term" merely a tool by which a message can be framed, or are these terms themselves the driving force of a rhetorical strategy, with message framing being only one factor in their inherent potency?

Branding and labeling are not a rhetorical phenomenon isolated to the advertising community. Political rhetoric is rife with both, and as political consumerism has expanded greatly in recent years the appeal of creating a partisan "brand" and easily digestible labels has only grown[22]. Looking at political parties and politicians as marketable "goods," one can apply the same rhetorical techniques to political communication as one does to the business community. Teasing out the differences between brands and labels can be difficult, as their functions often overlap. For the purpose of this review, labels tend to be more specific and policy based, while brands function more as an overarching framed image or identity.

Labels are a powerful force in political rhetoric, as a collection of labels often serves to define (or "brand") a politician or political force. For example, "gun-friendly" is a label that the modern Republican Party often assigns to its politicians. The GOP embraces this label to convey to conservative voters that the Party will not pursue legislation that restricts the citizens' ability to purchase, own, or carry a gun. This label, and others like it, has a type of dual potency; they both associate a desirable characteristic with the candidate attached to it and implicitly label an opponent as the opposite. By definition, if one candidate is the "gun-friendly" candidate than his opposite must be the "gun-adverse" candidate. This type of double-edged label is especially potent in America's two-party system. The abortion debate is a perfect example of competing labels. Because abortion is such a divisive issue, both sides of the debate have labeled themselves without mentioning the actual issue (Orwell would certainly have a problem with this type of doublespeak, but I digress). "Pro-choice" and "pro-life" are not comprehensive position stances on the issue of abortion, but the power of these labels actually comes from their implicit antonym; neither side wants to be "anti-choice" or "anti-life."

Labels are not solely self-ascribed or represent one of only two sides. The labeling of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) as an "eco-terrorist organization" by opponents and ultimately the

FBI destroyed the organization's hope of being seen as sharing a serious and reasoned message. It also is a prime example of the power of labeling to create a lens through which an organization is viewed that is outside the standard definition. Even though the ELF never killed or injured any people in any of their actions, their property damage is equated to the victims of organizations like AL Qaeda and Hamas. Elena Konova provides a thorough analysis of the labeling of the ELF as a "terrorist organization" and their actions as "terrorism, summed up in four "rhetorical tactics" through which this label operates: 1) "guilt by association" -- establishing a parallel between the property damage caused by the ELF and the human victims of terrorism, as well as justifying the punishment of the ELF members as "terrorists" in the eyes of the law; 2) "blurring the lines between radical activism and terrorism" -- emphasizing the potential danger of radical activists like the ELF; 3) "application of terms of negative connotations" -- justifies the view of ELF actions as "politically motivated violence," thus eliminating the environmentalists credibility and influence -- after all, "we do not negotiate with terrorists;" and 4) an "extension of the conventional definition of terrorism"[23].

Branding, and especially partisan branding, is another important cognitive heuristic designed to entice votes. Political scientists have long known that the most reliable predictor of vote choice is an individual's partisan identity, and so political parties and the politicians within them have strong motivation to create and uphold a compelling, marketable partisan brand. This helps to establish "brand loyalty" and prevents voters from defecting to another political party. Catherine Needham summarizes the characteristics of successful partisan branding as follows:

> First, brands simplify choice and reduce dependence on detailed product information, in much the same was as party labels relieve voters of the need to familiarize themselves with all the party's policies. Secondly, brands provide reassurance by promising standardization and replicability, generating trust between

> producer and consumer, much as parties emphasize unity and coherence in order to build up voter trust. Thirdly, brands, like parties, are aspirational, evoking a particular version of the 'good life' or holding out the promise of personal enhancement. Fourthly, to be successful, brands must be perceived as authentic and value-based[24].

Brands create an easily digestible identity, eliminating the need for voters to have a thorough understand of individual policy stances and issue records. They also allow individual politicians to associate themselves with a party, lending credit and experience to their governance and candidacy. These brands can be formulated through many different means; they often involve a collection of labels operating together to form a cohesive political identity; they are often established by putting precedence on specific "ultimate terms" and value-laden ideals over others. Partisan branding is essentially the process of packaging ideological stances into digestible rhetoric, and as such borrows from the other devices discussed in this chapter.

The role of party leaders as brands for the party bears most heavily upon study of the ideonym. Especially considering this era of 24/7 news, horserace coverage, and an increasing focus on image and personality, favorable party leaders can effectively sum up the desirable attributes of the party, creating a brand around this leader in the hopes of associating other members of the party with his or her successes[25]. The Democratic Party is currently experiencing a backlash from branding their party around Barack Obama, who has come to be a contentious figure in American politics. This is the risk of idolizing a person as a branding agent instead of a "charismatic term" or similar phenomenon; ideas can be infallible -- people cannot.

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[1] Enos, Theresa, *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient times to the Information Age* (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 741.
[2] Burke, Kenneth, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: U of California, 1969), 187.
[3] Burke, 187.
[4] Weaver, Richard M, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1953), 211.
[5] Young, Fred Douglas, *Richard M. Weaver, 1910-1963: A Life of the Mind* (Columbia: U of Missouri, 1995), 147.
[6] Weaver, 212-218.
[7] Weaver, 214.

[8] Weaver, 222.
[9] Weaver, 232.
[10] McGee, Michael Calvin. "The "ideograph": A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66:1 (1980): 1-16, p. 2.
[11] McGee, 2.
[12] Condit, Celeste Michelle, and John Louis. Lucaites, *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-African Word* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1993), 309.
[13] McGee, 8.
[14] McGee, 15.
[15] Burke, Kenneth, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: U of California, 1966), 45.
[16] Burke, 45.
[17] Burke, 45.
[18] Burke, 49.
[19] Burke, 45.
[20] Entman, Robert M. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication* 43:4 (1993): 51-58, p. 52.
[21] Hallahan, Kirk. "Seven Models of Framing: Implications for Public Relations." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 11:3 (1999): 205-42, p. 208.
[22] Bennett, W. Lance. "Branded Political Communication: Lifestyle Politics, Logo Campaigns, and the Rise of Global Citizenship." *Politics, Products, and Markets: Exploring Political Consumerism past and Present*. Ed. Michele Micheletti, Andreas Føllesdal, and Dietlind Stolle. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2004): 101-25, p. 101.
[23] Konova, Elena. "Rhetoric Techniques of Labeling of Environmentalists as 'Terrorists': The Case of the Earth Liberation Front in the United States of America, 1996 – 2006." Diss. (U of Gothenburg School of Global Studies, 2012), 44-45.
[24] Needham, Catherine. "Brands and Political Loyalty." *Journal of Brand Management* 13:3 (2006): 178-87, p. 179.
[25] Konova, 182.

THE IDEONYM

There has been extensive study across rhetorical criticism and communication studies about the rhetorical strategies employed to shape effective political messaging. The research often overlaps, as within a message there are many rhetorical devices functioning concurrently and words and phrases frequently serve multiple roles in presenting a persuasive message. Defining the rhetorical devices used in political discourse therefore becomes a matter of refining and narrowing concepts to better understand the precise role that certain words play in political persuasion.

I am wary of classifying the ideonym as a specific type of "ultimate term" as the hierarchical nature of the research observing them seems to suggest that these terms can all be measured against each other, and I have not found that to be the case for ideonyms. Often, individual ideonyms exist within completely different discussions and context, which does not allow them to be ranked in order of power. By definition, ultimate terms are in competition with each other -- politicians who employ ultimate terms to justify their actions are engaged in a battle to frame their term with a higher value than other terms. Arguments over the ideonym are not focused on the strength of its inherent value in comparison to others but rather whether an ideonym is stronger than the unpacked definition and examination that it is trying to overshadow. The ideonym is tied to a public persona rather than an abstract value term and so can't be ranked hierarchically. While they are not always "ultimate," ideonyms can, like ultimate terms, encode moral judgments in apparently descriptive terms and thus prevent full deliberation about the policies or issues that they name.

The ideonym functions to influence the interpretation of a specific message, much like terministic screens and frames. Ideonyms can therefore be discussed as a complementary effort to establish one message over another, but they are unique in the message they are trying to overcome. The ideonym is not a tool used in a debate over the merits of ideological doctrine – it is employed to

avoid discussing ideological merit at all. Where screens and frames can be broadly defined to encompass any effort to establish a lens through which an issue is viewed, an ideonym aims to hustle people though the viewing and straight to the judgment.

The ideonym is most closely related to rhetorical branding -- indeed the successful ideonym functions to create a cognitive heuristic that inspires comfort, disgust, or simplifies complicated ideological choices. In some cases these ideonyms could be used to damn or praise a politician, policy, or platform, or it could be used to select and reinforce a specific audience around group identifications via a strong positive or negative image or concept. Either way, the ideonym is employed to provide a shortcut to a judgment, and the one who creates this shortcut hopes that through a positive or negative association that judgment will be in line with his or her own interpretation. Whether these types of cognitive shortcuts are effective methods of determining ideological stances and evaluating policy is an argument in political science that has evidence falling on both sides. It can, however, be demonstrated that either way ideonyms encourage a distancing from fact-based evaluative judgment in favor of gut-reactions and associations with other people or events on which they have previously established opinions.

The examples included in this text all share a common purpose and rhetorical strategy, and it is this purpose and strategy that comes to define the term. Because a primary goal of the ideonym is to create a base-value judgment without necessary consideration of facts and complex political ideals, there should be only two types of ideonym, similar to god-terms and devil-terms: A positive-association ideonym, which looks to equate a particular idea or event with an individual who is largely admired or revered, and a negative-association ideonym, which aims to associate an ideal or event with an individual who is largely disliked or perceived to be inadequate. These associations can be explicitly stated, i.e. by including the individual's name in the ideonym, or implicit, by implying the association with an individual through the use of previously associated terms. This two-type

definition is complicated, however, by the fact that associations with individuals will often have value judgments across the positive-negative spectrum, as different people will have different opinions and judgments about the individual. Thus, a positive-association ideonym could have a negative impact on a specific audience, and vice versa. In order to go beyond simple identification of ideonyms, rhetoricians need to be able to evaluate their effectiveness, and examining the distance between the intended positive or negative association ideonym and the reality of the ideonym's reception is one way of doing that.

In summary, the ideonym has four defining elements: 1) a proper name—of a public persona or a name tied strongly to the ethos of a persona 2) strong evaluative associations already established in the audience in connection with that proper name and 3) program, policy, or event connected to that name such that 4) attitudes about the event, policy, or program are channeled through and determined by associations with the name rather than through analysis or deliberation. While the ideonym borrows from the similar functions of some rhetorical strategies, it is unique in its ethos-centric driver of value and meaning.

THREE CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES

Having examined the rhetorical devices that are central to but separate from discussion on the ideonym, we now have a more thorough understanding of what makes an ideonym unique as well as how it theoretically functions in political discourse. From this theoretical framework we can now look at examples that are currently in use in American conversations about politics to demonstrate the practical impact of the ideonym on language and the interpretations of political messages. In this chapter, I will examine three topical examples – "Obamacare," "Reaganomics," and the "-gate" suffix – to demonstrate their place in political language. For each of these ideonyms I will consider the invention of the term and its context, the history of its use and change, and provide rhetorical analyses of some key texts. I will then close with an analysis of the impact of these ideonyms by examining polling data, congressional records, and major speeches to understand the impact on voter awareness, public opinion, and political strategy.

"Obamacare"

The term "Obamacare" was originally created in 2007 to label the health care policy reform initiatives of then-candidate Barack Obama, and then came to label the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) after it was signed into law on March 23, 2010[1]. It was established as a rhetorical talking point by GOP presidential candidates, gained popularity among conservatives tremendously quickly, and has gone on to define the healthcare debate for seven years and counting. It is a solid example of a modern political ideonym, and can be used to answer important questions about impact and effectiveness and teach rhetorical scholars about the consequences of negative-association ideonyms in policy debate.

The word "Obamacare" was first used in March of 2007 by lobbyist Jeanne Scott in the journal Healthcare Financial Management, saying "We will soon see a 'Giuliani-care' and 'Obama-

care' to go along with 'McCain-care,' 'Edwards-care,' and a totally revamped and remodeled 'Hillary-care' from the 1990s." She used the word simply to distinguish between the health care plans of the many different presidential candidates of the primaries[2]. The word on its own, used in this context, conveys no emotional response, ideological concern or moral stance. In this sense the ideonym is similar to many ideographs mentioned by McGee, which have a meaning that is not associated with their ideograph status. It wasn't until Mitt Romney associated the word with "socialized medicine" and touted the reforms as evidence of the socialist agenda Republicans had been attributing to Barack Obama that the word "Obamacare" took on a different connotation. Socialism has an extremely negative, and often distorted, image in American society, having come to express disdain for any type of social welfare that is perceived to help the "takers" in a society. It is more than a type of economic system to the American people; it is perceived as a threat to the American dream[3]. Romney stated in May of 2007: "The path of Europe is not the way to go. Socialized medicine. Hillarycare. Obamacare." With that simple statement, Romney laid the groundwork for the term that would define the healthcare argument.

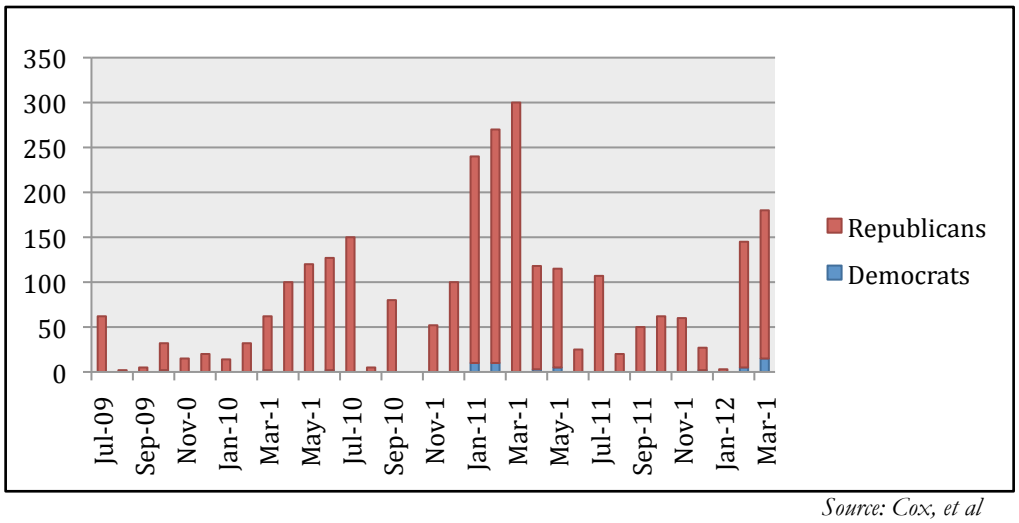
The use of the word "Obamacare" by Republicans is no accident or spontaneous generation of a talking point. In September of 2010, the Republican polling company Public Opinion Strategies found that 49 percent of registered voters reacted negatively to the term "Obamacare", with only 29 percent reacting favorably. That 2010 poll found that when the term "Obamacare" was used in lieu of the more neutral 'healthcare reform' in a question of support or opposition, positive reaction to the healthcare law dramatically decreased[4]. As democratic pollster Jeff Horwitt of Hart Research Associates put it, "The aim of the bill is to make health care more affordable and make sure more people are covered, whereas, to me, 'Obamacare' is focused on one person, and literally, it's about him taking care of someone or something: a Big Brother socialist caretaker"[5].

It made sense for Mitt Romney to create and use an ideonym to negatively shade the Obama

healthcare reform plans. Barack Obama was running on a big health care promise that many Republicans were not fond of, a promise that was modeled after Romney's own health care reforms in Massachusetts. If the health care plans were going to be compared side by side on their content, it would be clear that the two ideas were incredibly similar, and Romney would have to answer for his changed position on the reforms he no longer supported. However, by creating an ideonym that included the name of his opponent and associating it with socialism, a word already distrusted by the American public as a result of the Red Scare of Cold-War era American politics[6], the issue was no longer about the content of the proposed bill. It became a war of words, with rhetoric overshadowing content. "Obamacare" would go on to be used 447 times before March 11, 2012 by the top four Republican presidential candidates during the 2012 election.

The ideonym really took off after President Obama took office. Below is a chart of the use of the word in congress, after Roy Blunt of Missouri, then a congressman, and Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona entered the word into the Congressional Record for the first time on July 8, 2009.

Chart 1: Use of "Obamacare" in Congressional Debate According to Congressional Record, July 2009-March 2012



Source: Cox, et al

As you can see, the word "Obamacare" had become a GOP staple in the debate over the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in Congress.

The use of the ideonym "Obamacare" has had a large and significant effect on public opinion about the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Its use by Republicans has been extremely successful in confusing the general public about the contents of the bill, and how it will affect their daily lives. This confusion has given way to two important problems impeding the discussion surrounding the healthcare reform debates; people do not have accurate information about the individual measures within the law or what the law means for them.

To demonstrate the disconnect between the American public and accurate knowledge of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, I've looked at the fourteen most wide reaching or well known provisions from the law. Below is a table of these provisions in the law. This table shows the favorability of these separate provisions when respondents are asked about them without any mention of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The last column of the table is the percentage of Americans surveyed in March of 2012 who believe that yes, this provision is a part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act[7]. All of the provisions included in the following chart are in fact included in the PPACA.

Table 1: Approval of PPACA Individual Provisions and Knowledge of Those Provisions in Law, March 2012

Percent who say that they feel favorable about each of these following elements of the health reform law:	Total	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Percent who say yes, ACA includes this provision
Cannot be denied for pre-existing condition	85%	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
Tax credits to small businesses	80%	89%	78%	77%	49%
Require easy-to-understand plan summaries	79	87	75	76	49
Subsidy assistance to individuals	71	87	70	51	56
Health plan decision appeals	71	84	73	57	51
Medicaid expansion	70	88	69	51	54
Guaranteed issue provision	69	76	70	62	51
No cost sharing for preventative services	69	87	66	53	37
Stay on parent's insurance until 26	68	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
Medical loss ratio	57	73	51	45	35
Employer mandate/penalty for large employers	54	74	51	31	53
Increase Medicare payroll tax on upper income	53	74	50	26	43
Basic benefits package defined by govt.	51	80	49	20	57
Individual mandate/penalty	32	45	32	19	64

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted March 2012)

As you can see, the individual provisions in the law (with the significant exception of the individual mandate provision) are quite popular, and have consistently been so over the last two years since the bill was signed into law. Over 75% of each party identification support the law's prohibition of coverage denial based on pre-existing conditions, tax credits to small businesses that offer healthcare coverage to their employees, and its requirement that plans include easy to understand summaries of their benefits and costs. There is also widespread support for subsidies for individuals who purchase health insurance, the ability of consumers to appeal their health insurance companies' decisions, the elimination of cost sharing for preventive services such as cancer screenings and family planning, and the expansion of Medicaid. Despite the high opinions of these components, however, overall favorability for the law as a whole has never reached 50%. This could have something to do with the last column of the table. Huge percentages of Americans do not know that these provisions that they support individually are included in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. In fact, the

component of the law that the most Americans are familiar with is also the least popular, the individual mandate. The American public who "does not have enough information/does not understand how the PPACA will affect them personally" is currently polling at 59%[8].

The American public has also misunderstood the components of the law to include unpopular provisions that are not actually in the law. The rates of misunderstanding are again highest among Republicans, but they are by no means isolated in their misinformation. About one of every five Americans "didn't know" whether these provisions in the health care law, as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: Inaccurate Knowledge of Provisions NOT Included in the PPACA

Do Americans believe that the following provisions (which are NOT in the ACA) are included in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act?	Yes	No	Don't Know
Allow a government panel to make decisions about end-of-life care for people on Medicare			
Total	36%	45%	20%
Democrats	35	54	10
Republicans	41	39	21
Create a new government run insurance plan to be offered along with private plans			
Total	52%	30%	18%
Democrats	43	38	19
Republicans	68	20	13

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted March 2012)

National surveys conducted by Stanford University in 2010 and 2012 suggest the following conclusions: American understanding of what is and is not in the ACA has been far from perfect. Correct understanding of the elements of the bill examined varied with party identification: Democrats had the most accurate understanding, independents less, and Republicans still less. Older people and more educated people have understood the elements of the bill we examined better than have younger and less educated people. Between 2010 and 2012, public understanding of the elements of the bill examined did not change notably. Most people have favored most of the

elements of the ACA that we examined, but not everyone recognized that these elements were all in the plan. Most people opposed policies that were sometimes falsely thought to be parts of the ACA, such as the concept of "death panels". If the public had perfect understanding of the elements examined in this study, the proportion of Americans who favor the bill might increase from the current level of 32% to 70%[9]. Taken together, all this suggests that if education efforts were able to correct public misunderstanding of the bill, public favorability might increase considerably

What does this lack of information have to do with the word "Obamacare"? Quite simply, the use of this ideonym changed the way that the law has been discussed. Most of the language surrounding the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2012 was not the law itself, because the law itself was not being read and debated. Instead of debating the political divide over the law, there has been created a sharp partisan divide over how to *refer* to the law. The law under the name "Obamacare" becomes a referendum on President Obama himself, not just his healthcare reforms, as evidenced by the fact that in 2011 The Kaiser Family Foundation found that 44% of those who viewed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act negatively said their opinion is "more about my general feelings about the direction of the country, the President, and what's going on in Washington right now" than the actual content of the law.

"Obamacare" has excused the politicians, as well as the American public, who are discussing the law from having to unpack and really examine it. Median Voter Theorem states that because the cost of becoming an educated voter (the time and effort one must put into learning about candidates, policies, and ideological stances) is disproportionately high compared with the benefit of voting (casting only one vote among millions), people are not very motivated to educate themselves about these issues (Rowley, 106-113). Politicians are aware of this, and as such are highly motivated to reduce complex political debates into simple "sound-bite" style rhetorical battles. This is why "Obamacare" has been so successful in reframing the healthcare reforms as an affront to personal

liberty; the public doesn't have to know the details of the hundreds of pages of a complicated law, they only have to believe that Big Brother Obama is trying to control their access to healthcare and know that they don't want to reside in Orwell's *1984*.

By the criteria for measuring the success of an ideonym established earlier in this paper, "Obamacare" has been extremely successful in its strategy to excite the Republican base and reinforce the GOP's group identification with an opposition to government subsidized health care expansion. Republicans are much less likely to support the reforms, and also more likely to use the word "Obamacare" when referencing the law. It has been only slightly less effective at establishing a negative association with the American population at large, and obviously impacts the discussion of the law in bipartisan conversation and media coverage.

The word "Obamacare" has been primarily used and defined by opponents of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and this is why the negative association with the word is hard to shake. One of the fundamental traits of an ideonym is that its power is based in the fact that the word doesn't have one clear, concise definition that is constant from person to person. "Obamacare" is no exception. The word in itself is not negative, but the context that surrounds it generally is, and that is what made the difference. Ideonyms are given power both by the unperceived ambiguity of the word and people's reluctance to point out and question this ambiguity. When "Obamacare" started to take off, Democrats tried to strike the word from the Congressional record and ban it from Congressional mailings under the premise that it was "disparaging to the President of the United States" and such disparaging remarks were prohibited in Congress[10]. Because the GOP implied that the term was negative, and Democrats accepted this and reacted accordingly to it, the word was never really unpacked. It just became associated with socialized medicine, death panels and a loss of the right to make your own decision regarding your doctors and health insurance, without the public stopping to question the legitimacy of these claims. 36% of

Americans believe that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act will allow a government panel to make decisions about end-of-life care for people on Medicare, and 52% believe the law will create a new government run insurance plan to be offered along with private plans[11]. Neither of these stipulations is included in the law, but they are included in what the "Obamacare" ideonym has come to mean for so many Americans who do not support the law.

Many supporters of the law, including President Obama, have now begun using the word in an attempt to dispel the negative associations with both the word and the law[12]. They've worked to associate it with the idea that "Obama Cares" about the American people on bumper stickers and pins, and have started using the term "Obamacare" instead of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act when talking about the benefits of the law. They want to have the term that is now almost exclusively used as a title for the law be associated with more that GOP opposition. But despite Democratic efforts to reclaim the term "Obamacare" as something positive, the word continues to negatively shadow the healthcare debate, as well as many other social policy debates. These attempts are relatively recent, and perhaps there will be some headway in changing the meaning of "Obamacare". But with significant percentage differences between polls that do and do not use the ideonym, evidence points towards an arduous battle. As Grant Barrett, vice president for the American Dialect Society, says, it is almost impossible to persuade people to discontinue the use of a political word. "It's an invitation to have your heart broken. You forbid it, and they start writing it on the bathroom stalls." The Democrats may have to simply accept the test of history to determine the ultimate connotation of "Obamacare". As the provisions of the law go into effect and more and more American people see the actual impact of the law in their lives, if those people's perceptions change in spite of the negative associations with the word, so too will the connotation of the word itself.

The term "Obamacare" has had a definite impact on the healthcare reform discussion over

the last six years, and still does today. It's use to describe health care policy proposed and passed by the Obama administration and a Democratic Congress inhibited open and accurate discussion of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act by moving the discussion away from the contents of the law and towards a rhetorical battlefield. Democrats made a mistake in accepting the word as a negative term, cementing the definition of "Obamacare" as a synonym for socialist policy, a Big Brother piece of legislation that wanted to take your choices away from you. The American people heard arguments over the word itself, and as a result are still today painfully unaware of the content of the actual law and the impact it will have on their lives. I am not arguing that without the ideonym the healthcare debate would have a different public opinion division, or that if the word "Obamacare" was never used there would be sweeping support for the legislation. The difference would be that the divide would be over the content of the policy, and when the American people were asked about the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, they would base their answers more on their opinion of the law, and less on their personal definition of a term that was created to sound scary. When the American people are only told to judge a law on a positive or negative evaluation of its name, and that name has been shaped and defined by opposition, how can they be expected to judge it correctly? In the case of healthcare reform, the use of an ideonym distracted from the facts of the debate.

"Reaganomics"

Presidential ideonyms are not solely weapons of negative association to create a referendum on that president and his policy. They can also be used to add credibility and gravitas. The word "Reaganomics" is an example of such a positive association ideonym. Today, "Reaganomics" serves as a highly mythologized – and extremely effective – name for the economic policies of the 1980s economic recovery in America. However, this was not always the case – the word was originally used derisively as a critique of the policy plan. Only after Reagan left office and the collective

memory of the administrative began to shift to a more positive remembrance did the word take on a positive association.

The early history of the word "Reaganomics" follows a very similar trajectory to the word "Obamacare." Iconic radio broadcaster Paul Harvey coined the word in 1980 on his talk show "The Rest of the Story."[13] At the time, similar to the word "Obamacare," it was originally used in media journalism to quickly refer to the economic policies of the Reagan administration. It was then co-opted by detractors of the economic policies of the then-candidate, who suggested that Reagan was ignoring economic realities in favor of economic principals of his own creation. During the 1980 presidential election, both Republicans and Democrats critiqued the economic plan put forth by Reagan; Republican primary opposition George H. W. Bush interchanged the words "Reaganomics" and "voodoo economics" when describing the plan, contesting that Reagan's approach to economic theory wasn't based in reality but only personal conviction. Gerald Ford also heavily criticized the plan, which was a deviation from both liberal and moderate conservative economic policy, claiming that "Reaganomics" was a lone person's deviation from accepted economic theory.

While President Reagan was in office, the connotation of the word "Reaganomics" was largely affected by the popularity of the portmanteau's namesake. Reagan's approval rating started out at 68% when he was elected in 1981, and then fell to 35% by 1983, when the economic recession was felt hardest by the American people. As people began to feel some relief from these hardships, Reagan's approval ratings trended back upwards, with his leaving office in 1989 with an approval rating of 64% and a two-term average of 52.8%.[14] In 1986, Ronald Reagan famously said, "I could tell our economic program was working when they stopped calling it Reaganomics."[15] The term fell out of the opposition vernacular as the American people's faith in the economy and the President who was in charge of it grew until associating the policies with the man was no longer an effective rhetorical tactic. The word did not fall out of use, however – it merely dropped its negative

connotation, and as people's perceptions of the man changed, so did the meaning of the word. "Reaganomics" slowly morphed into a first neutral, and then positively associated ideonym.

The effectiveness of the word "Reaganomics" as a positive association ideonym increased with Reagan's approval ratings. The word's enduring status as a positive label for the economic policies of the Reagan administration (as well as those regularly associated with it) cannot simply be explained by the popularity of the president, however – if this were the case then every ideonym would be purely insular, with the word having opposite meanings depending on which side of the approval spectrum a particular audience member falls on. Like the word "Obamacare," which has a self-perpetuating negative undertone based on the perceptions of Obama by those who control the word, "Reaganomics" has always been aided by the positive views on Reagan's strength and goodwill by the American people. Take, for instance, polling data collected by Gallup during Reagan's time in office:

> Throughout the year [1982] a solid majority of Gallup's respondents have taken the position that Reaganomics will worsen, rather than improve, their own financial situation. Yet, Gallup consistently has found somewhat more public faith that Reaganomics will help the nation as a whole and even more faith in the president's program when the question is posed with regard to the long run. Surveys also indicate that the public has more confidence in Reagan than approval ratings of his performance would suggest. While only one third approve of the way he is handling the economy, close to half express some degree of confidence that he will do the right thing with regard to the economy.[16]

Even those who weren't seeing any positive impact from the economic policies themselves were more likely to agree that they would help the nation in the long run. This certainly has something to do with the second half of the results; the America people were always much more confident that

the President would "do the right thing" with regard to the economy than they were in the actual economic policies. This confidence in Reagan's inherent "goodness" has only increased with time, and it is because of this attitude towards the man that the word "Reaganomics" serves as a positive ideonym for proponents of a particular economic philosophy. Exactly what economic philosophy that is, however, is up for debate, and it is this complicated interpretation that is demonstrative of the influence of "Reaganomics" as an ideonym on the way that we discuss economic policy and attitude towards government today.

The realities of the economic policies of the Reagan administration often differ from the accepted principals of "Reaganomics" as touted by conservatives in political discourse today. Reagan's 1981 Program for Economic Recovery had four major policy objectives: (1) reduce the growth of government spending, (2) reduce the marginal tax rates on income from both labor and capital, (3) reduce regulation, and (4) reduce inflation by controlling the growth of the money supply.[17] Reagan was successful in this endeavor in some regards, and not successful in others. He reduced economic regulation; he eased or eliminated price controls on oil and natural gas, cable TV, long-distance telephone service, interstate bus service, and ocean shipping; he allowed banks invest in a somewhat broader set of assets; the scope of the antitrust laws was reduced.[18] Inflation rates fell drastically during his time in office, from double-digit inflation to 3.2%. However, federal spending grew by an average of 2.5 percent a year, adjusted for inflation, while Reagan was president. The national debt exploded, increasing from about $700 billion to nearly $3 trillion.[19] This was the result of large increases in defense spending and tax cuts for businesses and wealthy Americans without cuts in spending elsewhere. Reagan had a mixed record on tax cuts; in 1981 he slashed the marginal rate on the wealthiest Americans from 70 percent to 50 percent and established big tax breaks for corporations and the oil industry. However, Reagan signed measures that increased federal taxes every year of his two-term presidency except the first and the last. These included a higher gasoline

levy, a 1986 tax reform deal that included the largest corporate tax increase in American history, and a substantial raise in payroll taxes in 1983 as part of a deal to keep Social Security solvent. Median and lower income Americans paid a higher percentage of their income in taxes when Reagan left office than when he came in.[20]

These realities of the Reagan administration's economic legacy bear little weight on the meaning of the word "Reaganomics" today. The man has become a bastion of conservatism in the Republican Party, and had an approval rating of 72% in 2002 (lower only than Kennedy).[21] And "Reaganomics" have become the cornerstone of fiscal conservative ideology. "Reaganomics" encompasses the desire for smaller federal government, lowest possible taxes, balancing the federal budget, cutting social welfare programs, and embraces the idea that wealth "trickles down" from the wealthiest Americans when they have more to spend. The term comes to be more about the core elements of the "vision" of the person rather than particular policies and their fate.

"Reaganomics" is an incredibly successful example of a positive-association ideonym. To question the fealty of Ronald Reagan to these conservative principals (even though that question is often warranted) is cast as evidence of an unfair bias against conservativism in general: Reagan has almost become the face of Republicanism and untouchable by criticism. Economics is an incredibly complicated subject, and most Americans are not well versed in the theory and mathematical realities of economic study. Associating this complex economic ideology with such a popular President provides a cognitive heuristic for voters – they don't have to understand the intricacies of economic policy, they simply have to understand that the mythologized conservative icon "Reagan" would have supported it.

"Reaganomics" is also effective on establishing a cohesive set of talking points for the GOP. When Republicans question or alter their economic policy from the "Reaganomics" model, they are often accused of being "less conservative" than their more loyal peers. Larry Kudlow, an influential

conservative economic strategist, addressed 2016 Republican presidential hopefuls in February 2015, saying,

> "Our concern is that vision — what we'd call the Reagan vision or "Reaganomics" — is not shared by everybody" in the GOP. One reason that the GOP has been losing is that Reagan's message has not been used."[22]

The Koch brothers, the GOP's largest individual financial supporters and hard-line free market economists, have made similar comments about the importance of adhering to "Reaganomics." This ideonym is so entrenched in Republican discourse that to unpack its meaning or deviate from its accepted ideology is tantamount to party treason and could cost a potential candidate millions of dollars for their next campaign.

Republican rhetoricians have consciously shaped the meaning of the ideonym "Reaganomics". It's a look through rose-colored glasses at the economic policies of a very popular Republican legend, which excuses voters and politicians alike from having to understand complex economic theory.

The "-gate" Suffix

In the previous two sections, I've discussed two ideonyms that are neologisms with a political figure's name directly attached to them. These ideonyms act to brand legislation and a policy stance purported by that political figure. They function in a cyclical purpose, acting as both a referendum on that figure and as a reflection on the ideology of the policy stance. In this chapter, I am examining a different type of ideonym, and also a much more widely applied example. The "-gate" suffix, a derivative of the Watergate scandal that was the undoing of Richard Nixon, is widely attached to scandals to name them in the media, elite, and common discourse. It is perhaps the most clearly defined example of an ideonym in modern American political discourse, as the negative association with the "-gate" suffix is much more widely accepted by the greater American audience.

The gate suffix, objectively, has no longstanding meaning or root like other commonly used suffixes. There is no Latin or Greek root which allows it to modify the meaning of a word, the way that other suffixes operate. It is simply derived from the name of a hotel that became infamous for the scandal that began under its roof. When the reporting on the Watergate Scandal began in American media, the word "Watergate" was used only to reference the building or adjectively, as in "the Watergate caper" such as in the first Washington Post article on the subject on June 21, 1972. It wasn't until the fall of 1972 that "Watergate" became a freestanding noun, referring not to the hotel (which became "the Watergate") but to the scandal as a whole.[23] Eventually, the term came to encompass not only the breaking into the Democratic National Committee headquarters but the subsequent cover-up and constitutional crisis. Today, the term "Watergate" represents the array of shady and often-illegal activities carried out by the Nixon Administration in addition to the DNC crime, including the bugging of offices on political foes and people of whom the administration were suspicious and the use of the FBI, CIA, and IRS for the harassment of activist groups and political figures as well as the subsequent resignation of Richard Nixon and the indictment of 69 people and the pronounced guilt of 48 of those people.[24]

Safire's Political Dictionary cites "winegate," a scandal in France concerning the incorrect mixing and labeling of bottles of wine originally covered in America by the Washington Post on October 30, 1974 as the first instance of the "-gate" suffix being used to designate and label a scandal.[25] Most significantly, it is the first instance of the "gate" being detached from "Watergate" and meant to have a meaning on its own. Previously, while serving as a freestanding noun encompassing the mess of crimes perpetrated by the Nixon administration, the term was only directly connected to Richard Nixon and his aides. This separating of "-gate" from "Watergate" signals a shift in both how we discuss a scandal and also how we think about the Watergate Scandal – as indicative of a systemic type of corrupt government and career (politicians) rather than an

isolated incident. This is important in the function of the "-gate" suffix. When the "-gate" suffix is added to a scandal and that scandal is successfully branded a "-gate" scandal (i.e. the name catches on and media outlets, public discourse, and other elites use the name when referring to the scandal), it signals more than just a simple controversy.

The "-gate" suffix is used to create ideonyms that elevate the status of a scandal to the level of Watergate. It adds validity and gravity to the scandal, making it of "presidential" importance. This is why critics of the controversy are generally behind the generation of a "-gate" ideonym and why those at the center of the scandal avoid the term at all costs. If you can successfully label a controversy a "-gate" worthy scandal, it is viewed as more serious. Because of the overwhelming guilt of Nixon in the Watergate scandal, the "-gate suffix" suggests guilt at the center of the controversy. As with other ideonyms, it provides the audience with the ability to cast judgment before knowing all of the details of the scandal. This is why scandals that are successfully attached to "-gate" ideonyms are so damaging to reputations even when further investigation clears the subject of guilt – the connotation of guilt attached the word is tough to shake. It also helps to justify the media spending time investigating and reporting on the scandal. During Watergate, the press became the heroes of the story, rooting out entrenched corruption and holding President Nixon and his administration accountable for their actions. By adding the "-gate" suffix to the end of a scandal, the media implicitly defends its decision to spend airtime and column space on covering the story.

With the "-gate" suffix, an equally important implication of the ideonym is the existence of some sort of "cover up" or conspiracy. If a controversy is uncovered and the perpetrator immediately admits to his or her guilt, the "-gate" suffix is not successfully applied. The association to Watergate includes an association with an attempt to hide the truth or an abuse of power to deter an investigation. This function of "-gate" ideonyms reinforces the "guilty" connotation of these

words – when the center of a controversy denies involvement or provides their own evidence of innocence, they cannot be trusted to be telling the truth.

Take, for example, the recent scandal involving New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and his office's decision to close traffic lanes on the George Washington Bridge in Fort Lee, New Jersey on September 9, 2013. This overview of the scandal is brief, and a more thorough timeline of the entire affair can be found in the New York Times.[26]

On August 13, a deputy chief of staff to Gov. Chris Christie, Bridget Anne Kelly, emailed David Wildstein, then an appointee of Christie at the Port Authority: "Time for some traffic problems in Fort Lee." He wrote back, "Got it." Then on Septermber 9, two of three access lanes to the George Washington Bridge are closed, causing traffic chaos, especially in Fort Lee, at the mouth of the bridge in New Jersey. When told about Fort Lee Mayor Mark Sokolich's pleas for help opening the lane, Wildstein texted an unidentified person: "They are the children of Buono voters," referring to Christie's Democratic opponent for governor, Barbara Buono. Sokolich, who did not endorse Christie for re-election, tells Baroni he believes the lanes were closed as a "punitive" measure and asks for the closures to be lifted. Four days later the closures are lifted and the Port Authority says publicly that the lanes were closed for a traffic study. After an investigation of the lane closures were announced, Chris Christie repeatedly asserted his innocence. He first stated that his office was in no way involved, and then as the conversations between his staffers about the closing of the bridge became public, he told the press that he "had been lied to." Both Wildstein and Baroni resigned by the end of 2013, citing the "distraction" of the scandal for the Christie administration, and Kelly was fired. Wildstein later claimed that Christie did indeed know about the closings. In March of 2014, the legal team hired by Christie to conduct an internal review announces it found the governor was not involved in the traffic jam plot. Democrats say the review, which did not include interviews with many key players, is a "sham" and a "whitewashed" account of the

events. In December of 2014, New Jersey lawmakers cleared Christie of any involvement in the scandal.

Critics of Christie dubbed this scandal "Bridgegate" and the term was widely adopted by the media reporting on the story. Articles in the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, and other very influential newspapers used "Bridgegate" as the primary name of the scandal, beginning shortly after the lanes were reopened and an investigation was launched into the possibility of the closures being retribution against political enemies of Christie.

The "-gate" suffix is not limited to political scandals, although it seems to be a more effective rhetorical technique when used within political arenas, perhaps because the audience members are more aware of the details of the Watergate scandal. Take, as another example, the recent New England Patriots scandal dubbed "deflategate" by the media and opposition fans. This was controversy in the National Football League (NFL), stemming from an allegation that the New England Patriots used underinflated footballs in the AFC Championship Game against the Indianapolis Colts on January 18, 2015. The Patriots defeated the Colts 45-7, and allegedly this victory could have been aided by the underinflation of the Patriots' footballs, which are easier to grip, throw, and catch than their fully inflated counterparts. The official rules of the National Football League require footballs to be inflated to a gauge pressure between 12.5 and 13.5 pounds per square inch.[27] A "league source" stated that 10 of the 12 footballs were closer to 11.5 PSI.[28]

On January 22, Patriots' Head Coach Bill Belichick stated that he did not know anything about the balls being under-inflated until the day after the event, and that the New England Patriots would "cooperate fully" with any investigation. He said,

> "When I came in Monday morning, I was shocked to hear about the news reports about the footballs. I had no knowledge of the situation until Monday morning. [...] I think we all know that quarterbacks, kickers, specialists have certain preferences on

> the footballs. They know a lot more than I do. They're a lot more sensitive to it than I am. I hear them comment on it from time to time, but I can tell you, and they will tell you, that there's never any sympathy whatsoever from me on that subject. Zero. [...] Tom's personal preferences on his footballs are something that he can talk about in much better detail and information than I could possibly provide."[29]

Patriots' quarterback Tom Brady called the accusations "ridiculous." Brady denied any involvement and stated that the National Football League had not contacted him in regard to their investigation, and said that he was preparing for the Super Bowl and that "this isn't ISIS."[30]

On January 27, an anonymous league source disclosed that the investigation was centering on a locker room attendant for the Patriots who was seen on video surveillance taking the 24 game balls (12 for each team) into the bathroom (where there is no video surveillance) for about 90 seconds.[31] This "locker room guy" became the scapegoat for the scandal, with both Belichick and Brady claiming that if any tampering with the balls had taken place, it was at the hands of this attendant with no direction from anyone in the Patriots' leadership. As of today, neither the head coach nor head quarterback has been found guilty of any tampering or instruction to tamper with the footballs.

Both "Bridgegate" and "Deflategate" adhere to the principals of successful "-gate" ideonyms. The media extensively reported on them for weeks and months, and they were considered serious allegations of corruption. They were damaging to the reputations of Christie and the Patriots – even though both were cleared of guilt in their respective scandals, people remain unconvinced of their innocence. "-Gate" ideonyms provided a shortcut to both reporters and audience members. The ideonyms allowed the media to focus on these stories for multiple cycles without having to justify why these controversies were important to the lives of the American people. They also allowed impatient audience members to decide on the guilt of the parties involved

without having to wait for all the evidence to come out and the dust to settle. Like "Obamacare" and "Reaganomics," the "-gate" suffix implicitly adds a well-established and clear judgment to complicated realities without having to defend the association.

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CONCLUSION

The ideonym gets its meaning from the speaker, the context, and the audience that receives it. Once an ideonym has a positive or negative association, it is hard to change that perception. The word also demonstrates the ways that an ideonym can narrow the discussion of a political idea. When the audience is told to focus on a created label, make a quality judgment based solely on that label and then not to question it, the audience is not paying attention to all the facts. Ideonyms can be used to put complex political ideas into understandable concepts, but they can also be used as an excuse not to consider those complex political ideas at all. "Obamacare," "Reaganomics," and the "-gate" suffix demonstrate how an ideonym can be created, shaped, and perpetuated to accomplish a specific goal in a political atmosphere. "Obamacare" demonstrates the means of creating and disseminating ideonyms in political discourse and the power of a widely used negative-association ideonym on policy discussion and public knowledge of policy. "Reganomics" demonstrates temporal shift in meaning based on the popularity of the man to which its meaning is attached, showcasing the ethos-centric nature of this rhetorical strategy. The Watergate ideonym shows how it can have broader implications that simply existing in isolated political discourse. Each of these examples demonstrate the four defining elements of an ideonym: 1) a proper name—of a public persona or a name tied strongly to the ethos of a persona 2) strong evaluative associations already established in the audience in connection with that proper name and 3) program, policy, or event connected to that name such that 4) attitudes about the event, policy, or program are channeled through and determined by associations with the name rather than through analysis or deliberation.

Therein lies the power of the ideonym; if an ideonym is used successfully it derails one conversation in favor of another to benefit the cause of those employing it. "Obamacare" derails the discussion of the factual components of the ACA and turns instead to a referendum on the President; "Reaganomics" conjures an aspirational image of capitalism at its finest and the popular

leader who believes in it while discouraging the muddying of this image with an examination of these policy impacts; the "-gate" suffix ends a conversation about the realities of a scandal, and begins a discussion about the coming punishment.

When complex political ideas are thrown away because the politicians, and the media, and the American public would rather accept an ideonym than unpack an idea, there can be no solutions to the complex political problems that face our democracy today.